

Representative Fox, Senator Coleman, and Distinguished Members of the Judiciary Committee,

My name is Shanna York and I am writing to you today to express my opposition to S.B. 280 (RAISED) AN ACT REPEALING THE PENALTY FOR CAPITAL FELONIES.

Last year I sat in the Legislative Office Building for some 14 hours awaiting my turn to testify before your committee listening to many testimonies both for and against death penalty repeal. I'm sure many of those same people will appear before you today. Among those people will be victims. I want you all to know that I feel for each and every one of them whether they are for or against repeal. A common theme among them seems to be the re-victimization that occurs in a courtroom during a capital trial. While I strongly agree that there is re-victimization I strongly disagree with this argument as a means to repeal the death penalty. Our courts exist for the sole purpose of punishing those people who have broken laws. Many victims speak about the need to heal and find peace stating that capital trials prevent this from occurring. No victim is ever going to find healing or peace in any courtroom anywhere regardless of what sentence might be found appropriate by a jury.

A question that I heard over and over last year from the defense team for Joshua Komisarjevsky was: Do you think the state should reserve the right to kill a fellow citizen? My answer is yes. We grant the state the authority to make laws on our behalf. We have certain laws that are deemed to be more serious than others, i.e. capital felonies. If we're going to have laws that are considered more serious than others I think that we absolutely need to have punishments that fit those crimes accordingly. Pro death penalty repeal folks will argue that granting the state the authority to kill as a punishment allows them the opportunity to play God. I find this argument to be quite flawed. It is not the state who plays God when a sentence of death is imposed or carried out. The person who is playing God is the one who is out on the streets doing whatever they want to whomever they choose.

Many times other states that still have the death penalty on their books are cited as examples of why this punishment is wrong, flawed, or in ill taste. I'm tired of this argument. I don't live in Texas so therefore I do not care if their death penalty is flawed. Let Texas worry about Texas. I am concerned with Connecticut and not one of the eleven men on death row here are or ever have claimed innocence. Each of them was found guilty by a jury of their peers, their sentences were determined by those same people, and their punishments should be carried out accordingly. I think it is completely naïve for anyone in this state to believe that the prospective language you have put into this repeal bill will actually hold up in court should our eleven death row inmates seek to have their sentences overturned. I find it insulting that what we have before us is basically a lie to appease the masses based on the fact that you all know that 67% of people in Connecticut support the death penalty. Yet once again we find ourselves faced with the fact that voice of the majority may very well be ignored and trumped by the voice of the few who happen to have the luxury of being well funded by deep pockets. We all know that the death penalty was brought front and center during the recent Petit case. Senators flipped their votes based on that case. If you are going to repeal the death penalty have the decency to come out and be honest with your constituents and call it

what it really is, total repeal not prospective repeal. While you're at it remind the people who voted for you that you completely ignored them while casting your vote to do the exact opposite of what they wanted.

For the record I would like you to know that I am not a victim of violent crime. No one in my family has ever been a victim of violent crime. I also want you to know that I am fully aware that this may not always be the case. Crime strikes without rhyme or reason. It happens every day, in every neighborhood, and hits people from all walks of life. Today it may be a complete stranger who suffers at the hands of another but tomorrow it may be me or you. No one is exempt. Should something ever happen to me or a member of my family I want to know that this state will seek justice. Every time a repeal bill is introduced you make it quite clear that you have no intention of seeking justice. The death penalty is justice and not revenge as I'm sure many before you today will argue. Revenge is retaliation as oneself in kind or to degree. Twelve people who are not connected to victims and who have no emotional attachments to them in capital trials are the ones who decide the sentence that should be imposed. I truly fail to see where that is revenge solely based on the definition of the word itself. That is what makes the death penalty qualify as justice. Should you go forward with repeal, none of you should ever let the word justice leave your lips. You should not be using words that you clearly don't understand.

I've heard two men sentenced to death in my lifetime. I was there in person when both Steven Hayes and Joshua Komisarjevsky received the death penalty for brutally and heinously murdering Jennifer, Hayley, and Michaela Petit. I listened as the judge imposed 6 death sentences on each man. I'll be honest with you all. Listening to a human being be sentenced to death was a bit nauseating among other feelings. But as I sat there in that courtroom I thought about what those two men did to those three innocent women. Not one thing that I felt for Hayes or Komisarjevsky negated or trumped what I felt when I thought of Jennifer, Hayley, or Michaela Petit.

To finish, I would absolutely love to live in a world where there was no death penalty. I would also like to live in a world where we didn't kill each other. The latter will never come to fruition. The death penalty, however evil some may see it, is absolutely needed, warranted where applied, and should never be taken off the books.